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ON PAGE **A4**

NEW YORK TIMES
29 October 1985

Aid to Angola Rebels Is Debated In Administration and Congress

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 28 — A debate has erupted within the Reagan Administration and in Congress over whether the United States should assist the Angolan rebels, who are aided by South Africa, in their fight against the Soviet-backed Angolan Government.

Senior Administration officials said today that the dispute is sharp. The State Department seems to stand alone within the Administration in opposing either open or secret aid to the rebels. The department argues that such aid would align Washington with South Africa and upset chances for a settlement of the conflicts in southern Africa.

The department has allies on Capitol Hill, such as the leadership of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa, who also oppose such aid. However, the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and many members of Congress are arguing that aid to the Angolan rebels is crucial to countering Soviet and Cuban military involvement in Angola.

They are backing a bill to provide the Angolan rebels with \$27 million in humanitarian aid, the same amount that was appropriated for the rebels in Nicaragua. They are also urging that covert military aid be given to the Angolan rebels.

'No Final Decision'

A White House official, confirming the disagreements over the issue, said that he hoped a policy decision could be reached soon. "No final decision has been made," he said.

The Marxist Angolan Government is backed militarily by 30,000 Cuban troops, and receives Soviet equipment. The insurgent group, the Union for the Total Independence of Angola, known by its initials in Portuguese as Unita, has been aided by South Africa.

A bill providing \$27 million in nonlethal aid was introduced Oct. 1, cosponsored by Representative Claude D. Pepper, Democrat of Florida, Representative Jack Kemp, Republican of New York, and 26 others.

Letter From Shultz

Two weeks ago, Secretary of State George P. Shultz sent a confidential letter to Representative Robert H. Michel, Republican of Illinois, the House minority leader, in which he urged that the bill "be discouraged."

He said that in recent weeks, both South Africa and Angola had asked the United States to help negotiate an end to the fighting in Angola and to renew efforts for an agreement that would lead to the independence of South-West Africa, also known as Namibia, and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

"The legislation which Congressmen Pepper and Kemp have proposed is ill-timed and will not contribute to the settlement we seek," Mr. Shultz said.

Mr. Michel, however, who usually

supports Mr. Shultz on foreign policy, replied with a letter supporting aid.

"I am concerned that if the Administration pursues the argument that it has made about not supporting Unita, the same arguments will come back to haunt us when the question of aid to the democratic forces in Nicaragua arises," Mr. Michel said.

Last week, Mr. Shultz telephoned Mr. Kemp, according to an aide to the Congressman, to repeat his opposition to the bill. This prompted Mr. Kemp to send a letter to Mr. Reagan criticizing the State Department position.

"As Americans, we stand on the side of freedom, self-determination, and human rights, in sharp contrast to the human misery, suffering, starvation, and dying economies that Soviet imperialism has brought to the African continent," Mr. Kemp said. "We need to make it clear to the rest of the world that the threat posed by the Soviets and Cubans will be met, and that the U.S. intends to support those people in Angola and Namibia who share our commitment to democratic government and open political societies."

In response to the moves to provide aid to the Unita forces, the six Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa have sent a letter to other Congressmen opposing aid.

"Any U.S. aid to Unita," the wrote, "would ally us with South Africa in its regional aggression and effectively undermine our ability to pressure South Africa" to dismantle apartheid. They also said that such aid would increase Angolan dependence on Soviet and Cuban aid.

A letter from the Congressional Black Caucus was also circulated last week that said, "Any such assistance, whether military, or so-called humanitarian aid, whether covert or overt, would definitely ally the United States with South Africa's minority regime."